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ABSTRACT

Findings from a study that examined the school-level factors related to the success of early efforts to restructure schools through school-based management are presented in this paper. Specifically, the study examined the antecedent factors expected to affect the probability of a school moving forward toward more extensive decentralization. An assumption of the study was that variables associated with greater student achievement also characterize schools with greater decentralization initiative. Methodology involved analysis of school district documents and reports of 130 schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District--65 schools engaged in decentralization and 65 not involved. Findings indicate that schools exhibiting some degree of decentralization were smaller and had greater ethnic and linguistic student and faculty diversity. The finding that schools did not differ significantly on the dimensions of socioeconomic status or fiscal discretion suggests that variables exert influence at different stages of decentralization. Two tables are provided. (21 references) (LMI)

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THE MOVE TO DECENTRALIZE:

PREDICTORS OF EARLY SUCCESS

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Introduction

Restructuring schools through school-based management (SBM), or, more generally, decentralization, has become the centerpiece for restructuring efforts and has been endorsed by a wide range of educational practitioners, policymakers, and specialists. By shifting formal decision making authority away from central administration to a smaller decision making arena, the school, advocates argue that school productivity will increase because decisions regarding the educational program will be made by those most closely affected by them (teachers, students and parents). Furthermore, the effective schools literature suggests that greater school autonomy is necessary for educational reforms to have sustained impact (Purkey and Smith, 1985).

School districts adopting decentralization policies have employed a variety of implementation strategies (Clune and White, 1988; Wohlstetter and Buffett, 1991). Some districts require that schools participate in decentralization, while in others participation is voluntary (Wohlstetter and McCurdy, 1990). It is expected that the specific policy instrument used has implications for the success of the school-level response to decentralization initiatives (Wohlstetter and Buffett, 1991; Purkey and Smith, 1985). Despite predictable negative implications of particular implementation strategies, the types of decentralization policies continues to run the gamut. Clune and White (1988: 11) found that "programs originate in different ways and in different local contexts with no discernable common model".

In Los Angeles, the decentralization initiative was born out of the most recent collective bargaining agreement between the teachers union (United Teachers Los Angeles, or UTLA) and the school board. Unlike other efforts to decentralize, the Los Angeles initiative employed a two-tiered implementation strategy in which a) every school was delegated responsibility for a small number of educational

decisions, and b) more extensive decision making authority accompanies a second phase in which participation is voluntary. This approach is consistent with research which suggests that effective decentralization policy requires a multiplicity of implementation strategies to overcome the shortcomings of any one approach (cf. Purkey and Smith, 1985).

To begin this process, each school elected a local leadership council comprised of teachers, parents, community members, and the school administrator. To shift to school-based management, in which responsibility for a broader range of decisions is delegated to the school level, a school's leadership council must submit an SBM proposal. A proposal must include the signatures of the school administrator, the union steward, and a parent/community representative. The council, therefore, must reach consensus on a shared vision of the school, agreement on what students need and which programs are best able to meet them. The SBM proposal is submitted to the Board of Education, UTLA, and a Central Council comprised of district and union appointees. Approval requires that the proposed plan clearly demonstrate how student achievement will improve if the plan is implemented*. Thus, the decentralization policy in Los Angeles is both a mandate (councils at every school must assume responsibility in prescribed decision areas) and a voluntary inducement (councils can, once granted central approval, gain control over a broader range of decisions).

This paper explores the school-level factors related to the success of early efforts to decentralize. Specifically, this study examines the factors expected to affect the likelihood of a school moving forward towards more extensive decentralization. For purposes of this discussion, a school which submits a SBM proposal will be

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* SBM plans must address a variety of issues including: what programmatic changes will be made, the school's educational philosophy, the impact the plan will have on multicultural student populations, etc.

referred to as exhibiting "decentralization initiative." The extent of decentralization, therefore, will be described in terms of the level of decentralization initiative. It is expected that variables such as school size, the diversity of the student population (in terms of both ethnicity and language proficiency) and of the school faculty, and the fiscal resources under the discretion of the leadership council will all influence the amount of decentralization initiative exhibited at the school site. The economic status of the student population and the ratio of teachers to students is also expected to influence this phenomenon.

While previous research efforts have focused on the success of decentralization efforts in terms of its effects on school outcomes and organizational processes, e.g., teacher behavior, attitudes, and/or job satisfaction (David, 1989; Sickler, 1988; Guthrie, 1986), this analysis aims to identify some of the antecedent variables which influence a school's success in moving toward more extensive decentralization. The variables being explored have been selected because they are school characteristics commonly associated with school effectiveness. Thus, an implicit assumption is that some of the same variables associated with greater student achievement will also be characteristic of schools with greater decentralization initiative.

Research Focus

Previous research has focused on the impact decentralization has on a number of school outcome and organizational process measures. While empirical research is inconclusive as to whether school-based management is a sufficient condition for improving student achievement (Malen and Ogawa, 1988; David, 1989), there is a growing consensus that greater school autonomy is prerequisite for a school to be effective (Purkey and Smith, 1985).

An important characteristic of effective schools is the ability of school site personnel to reach consensus on school goals. This quality is also critical for facilitating decentralization initiative. In Los Angeles schools, agreement on goals is a formal requirement for a school to decentralize. Literature on organizational decision making (e.g., Allison, 1971) suggests that even in districts or states where decentralization policy is mandated, lack of agreement on how decision making authority should be used (i.e., which programmatic direction the school should take) is more likely to result in the preservation of the status quo. The effective schools literature thus suggests a number of variables which are likely to be characteristic of schools which adapt decentralization policy more readily.

School size is included in the analysis for two reasons. First, small schools tend to have more orderly school climates and happier teachers (Chubb and Moe, 1988). This can be hypothesized to influence decentralization initiative in two conflicting ways. One could argue that happier teachers and an orderly climate reflect a school where the status quo is perceived to be working feasibly. Following this line of reasoning, teachers in small schools will be unlikely to make the necessary time investment to write and implement a plan - the status quo will be perceived as adequate. Alternatively, a more orderly school environment could be conducive to building consensus about school needs and organizational purpose, a necessary step to move toward a decentralized management style. Thus, school size, through teacher job satisfaction and the degree of orderliness at the school, is expected to influence the initiative to decentralize, but the direction of influence is unclear. With greater school autonomy cited as a characteristic of effective schools (Purkey and Smith, 1985), and with the status quo being widely held as unacceptable (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), a minimal effect of school size on preserving current modes of operation might be expected.

The second reason for including school size is the direct effect size has on the likelihood of site personnel reaching consensus on school goals (Monk and Haller, 1986; Goodlad, 1984). Instead of having solely a secondary impact through lower teacher satisfaction and less control, "the larger the school, the more difficult it is to achieve clear, consensual goals" (Newmann, 1981: 226). Because reaching consensus on school goals is an assumed prerequisite to move toward decentralization, we expect the larger the school, the less decentralization initiative the school will exhibit.

A second variable expected to impact early success in decentralization efforts is the diversity of the student population. High level of ethnic diversity in student populations of typical urban schools works against the establishment of consensus on standards within the school (Cusick, 1983). Ethnically and lingually diverse student populations are likely to have different educational needs which fragment opinions concerning the appropriate programmatic direction and school priorities. Consistent with this line of reasoning, it is expected that the greater the diversity of the student population, the less likely a school is to submit a proposal for greater decentralization. Diversity of the teacher population is also expected to influence the ability of school personnel to reach consensus. The rationale for including this variable is the same as that for including student diversity. Although not specifically addressed in the school effectiveness literature, it is expected that the greater the diversity of teachers, the more interests will compete during deliberations regarding further decentralization. It is therefore expected that greater faculty diversity will impede efforts to decentralize.

The socioeconomic status (SES) of the student population at the school is also expected to influence decentralization initiative in two ways. First, an increase in the number of economically disadvantaged students may lower the level of agreement among teachers on what and how to teach students (Newmann, Rutter

and Smith, 1989). Furthermore, schools serving low-income students were found to have staff members who are relatively more satisfied with the state of their schools (Brookover and Lezotte, 1979) or have lower expectations for their students (Newmann et al., 1989; Metz, 1988; Oakes, 1985). Thus, either because of the reduced likelihood of reaching consensus on what programs should be included in a school decentralization plan, or because of the refusal to acknowledge the problems of the current system (and thus not perceiving the need to change through decentralization), decentralization initiative should be positively related to students' SES.

A final factor expected to influence decentralization initiative is the amount of discretionary resources under the control of the school's leadership council. The assumed intermediary variable between discretionary resources and decentralization initiative is teacher attitudes. Teachers' perceptions of the rationale behind decentralization influences the extent to which they see it as worthwhile (Conley, Schmidle, and Shedd (1988). "When employees have the formal authority to make decisions, but their actual discretion is tightly circumscribed by...resource limitations or other factors, the purported benefits of participation strategies are often minimal or nonexistent" (Conley et al., 1988: 260). If councils have only marginal resources at their disposal, there is a good chance that they will be skeptical of managements' motives behind the decentralization policy. In contrast, greater fiscal discretion is more likely to elicit teacher buy-in. Thus, since a considerable amount of investment on the part of teachers is required to move into more extensive decentralization, greater fiscal resources under council control should favorably influence teachers' perceptions of the decentralization policy. Correspondingly, we expect to find that the resources under the discretion of the school council will be positively related to decentralization initiative.

Methodology

Sample

The analysis is based on a sample of 130 schools from the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Sixty-five of these schools exhibited decentralization initiative by submitting an initial proposal to move to school-base management during the 1989-90 school year. An additional sixty-five schools that did not submit proposals were randomly selected as a control group. Since a disproportionately high number of the schools initiating decentralization efforts were high schools (as opposed to junior high or elementary schools), control group selection was stratified according to school level.

Data and Variable Operationalizations

Data on school and community characteristics were extracted from the following LAUSD documents: Compensatory Education school rankings for 1989-90, the 1989-90 Ethnic Survey report, the 1989-90 Allocation of School Resources report, and the 1989-90 Limited English Proficient report. The definition of each variable used in the analysis appears in Table 1. Determination of which schools had initiated efforts to decentralize came from the Office of School-Based Management in the LAUSD.

To measure the level of early success in decentralization efforts (i.e., the amount of decentralization initiative exhibited by a school), each school was coded as belonging to one of three categories:
1) schools which did not submit either a preliminary or final school-based management plan; 2) schools which submitted a preliminary plan but have not had a final plan approved, and 3) schools which have had a final plan approved. In the discussion to follow, these three groups will be referred to, respectively, as the

"control", "submitted", and "approved" groups. For purposes made clear below, the twenty-six schools in the submitted group and the thirty-nine schools in the approved group will be combined for part of the analysis, and collectively referred to as the "sample" group.

Statistical Techniques

While most of the recent school effectiveness research employs qualitative methodology, this study used quantitative techniques to explore whether measurable factors influence decentralization initiative. Two types of comparisons were analyzed: 1) whether there are significant differences in the characteristics of the sample and the control groups, and 2) whether there are significant differences in the characteristics of the submitted and the approved groups. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to assess differences in the combined set of school variables, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to assess differences in each variable separately.

Results

The MANOVA results for both comparisons (control versus sample and submitted versus approved) are presented at the top of Table 2. These results indicate that there is a significant multivariate difference between the sample and control schools, but no significant difference between the submitted and the approved schools.

To examine differences in the separate variables, the ANOVA results are also presented in Table 2. In looking first at the sample versus the control group, a number of the school variables demonstrate significant differences. First, school size is significantly different ($p < .05$) in the predicted direction. The schools

exhibiting decentralization initiative are smaller than the control schools. Two other variables, student ethnic diversity and student linguistic diversity, are also significant ($p < .01$). However, the direction of these differences is opposite of what was expected, with greater diversity being found among the sample schools. Finally, the difference in teacher ethnic diversity is marginally significant ($p < .10$). Interestingly, this difference is in the direction predicted but in the opposite direction as the student diversity measures. Specifically, schools in the sample group exhibited less teacher ethnic diversity than those in the control group. The remaining two variables, socioeconomic status and fiscal discretion, did not yield significant results.

The comparison between the submitted group and the approved group primarily yielded insignificant results, as the only variable demonstrating a significance difference ($p = .05$) is socioeconomic status. The direction of this difference is as expected, however, with schools that have not had a final proposal approved (i.e., those in the submitted category) having a relatively lower socioeconomic status than those which did. While not achieving significance, differences in three of the remaining five variables (student linguistic diversity, teacher ethnic diversity, and fiscal resources) are in the predicted direction.

Discussion

The results from this exploratory analysis offer a confirmation of expected relationships, a challenge to conventional wisdom, and a call for more detailed research. The comparison between schools exhibiting some degree of decentralization initiative (i.e., submitting an initial plan irrespective of plan approval) clearly have characteristic differences from schools which do not demonstrate such initiative. Schools which are more likely to move toward more

extensive forms of decentralization tend to be smaller, have more ethnic and linguistic diversity among their students, and have less ethnically diverse full-time faculty. There are no apparent differences between these schools on dimensions of either socioeconomic status or fiscal discretion. The findings around school size are as expected; smaller schools decentralize more readily than larger ones. The operating hypothesis was that having fewer students would facilitate decentralization initiative because the smaller size makes the development of consensus both easier and more likely. Our findings support this contention.

The results surrounding the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the student body contradict our expectations. We anticipated that greater student diversity (as measured by either ethnic or linguistic diversity) would hamper consensus-building because there would be more "types" of students competing for resources and recognition as school goals are articulated. In fact, our findings indicate that increased student diversity actually facilitates decentralization initiative.

One explanation comes from the ethnic composition of the student population in the LAUSD. Los Angeles public schools are predominantly Hispanic (61.5%). Blacks (15.8%), Whites (14.6%), Asian (5.6%), and other ethnic minorities (2.5%) comprise the remainder of the student population. Thus, greater ethnic diversity in the student population at the school site could reflect a greater representation of students which teachers perceive as having fewer educational needs than those students which dominate more ethnically homogeneous schools. This rationale would predict that consensus-building would be facilitated by having greater diversity because a smaller proportion of the student population is clamoring for school resources and consideration in school goals.

The hypothesis that schools which have a more ethnically diverse faculty are less likely to decentralize is supported by our findings. The full-time school staff at the schools which exhibited greater decentralization initiative are, as a group, more

homogeneous. Because it is teachers (along with parent/community representatives and the school principal) who are formally responsible for submitting a plan to decentralize, greater diversity among this group makes it more likely that initiatives to decentralize will be impeded by divergent interests. While this mirrors the empirically-failed logic hypothesized to predict the influence of student diversity, it may still have some merit when applied to faculty.

Finally, with respect to the comparisons between the sample and the control group, the lack of significant results along socioeconomic dimensions may be explainable on theoretical grounds, especially in light of its significance when comparing the submitted group with the approved group in the second part of the analysis. The task of submitting an initial plan was no where near as onerous as having a final plan approved. The hardest part in having an initial plan submitted was securing the signatures of representatives of the main three education constituents at the school site (teachers, parents, and the school principal). In signing the initial plan, unlike the proposal for a final plan, a representative was only endorsing the idea that decentralization may be beneficial for their school. While doing so does require some decentralization initiative, it is a distant cousin of developing a plan which includes programmatic changes, identified student needs, and articulated school needs. Thus, it could be that where a low-level of commitment is needed, there is less likelihood that there will be significant differences between schools along dimensions of SES. When the commitment involves agreement on specific changes in the way a school does business, and hence, reaching consensus becomes more difficult, the effect that SES has on the ability of teachers to reach agreement on what and how to teach students (as found by Newmann et al. in 1989) become a significant factor.

The lack of significant results in the second part of the analysis would be disturbing if there were no significant findings in the sample-control comparison. It

is plausible to assume that the variables exert their influence at different times depending on what stage of decentralization a school is in. This makes particular sense if we understand decentralization initiative to comprise a continuum of the success of early efforts. Our findings are consistent with this conceptualization. School size, student ethnic and linguistic diversity, and teacher diversity all appear to influence some base level of decentralization initiative necessary to submit an SBM proposal. At this point, SES apparently does not influence decentralization because, although the control schools have relatively poorer students, the difference is not enough to be significant. However, when comparing the submitted schools with the approved schools, SES becomes a significant predictor of decentralization initiative and the previously influential variables all lose their significance.

Additional research is needed to verify generalizability and to further explore specific predictors of decentralization success. Particular attention should be paid to the student diversity measures, because our results regarding this school characteristics are counterintuitive. In most districts, greater ethnic diversity typically means more students that may be educationally at-risk; in Los Angeles, and possibly in many large urban school districts, the opposite is true. Before judging decentralization efforts as failures or successes, additional research is needed to address the factors which are antecedent to successful decentralization.

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TABLE 1

VARIABLE	OPERATIONALIZATION
Socioeconomic Status (SES)	A "poverty score" is determined for each school by calculating a weighted average of the following variables: the percentage of pupils on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1988-89; the percentage of pupils eligible for free lunch in 1988-89; and the previous years' figure for both of these variables.
School size	The number of standard deviations a school's enrollment is from the average for its kind (i.e. elementary or secondary).
Student Ethnic Diversity	The variance of the percentage of different ethnic groups within each school (Black, Hispanic, White, Asian, Filipino, Native American, and Pacific Islander). A lower variance indicates a school in which the four groups are represented more equally i.e. has greater ethnic diversity.
Student Linguistic Diversity	The variance of the percentage of Limited-English speaking (LEP) students at the school site. The native languages of LEP students include: Spanish, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Korean, Filipino, Portuguese, Japanese, Mandarin, Cambodian, Lao, and Other. As is the case with student diversity, lower variance reflects greater linguistic diversity.
Teacher Ethnic Diversity	The variance of the percentage of different ethnic groups within each school (Black, Hispanic, White, Other*). This figure is calculated in the same fashion that student diversity is measured except that this variable measures the diversity of full-time certificated staff at the school site.
Fiscal Discretion	The total discretionary dollars that each local council has control over divided by school enrollment.

* The "Other" category combines the Asian, Native American, Filipino, and Pacific Islander ethnic groups which collectively comprise approximately 8.6% of the total certificated staff in the LAUSD. Asian groups are the majority and account for approximately three-fourths of the Other category.

TABLE 2

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Variable	Sample (group 1) vs. Control (group 2)	Predicted Direction	Approved (group 1) vs. Submitted (group 2)	Predicted Direction
MANOVA results	**F = 2.74** **P = .0114**		**F = 1.26** **P = .2870**	
ANOVA results				
Socioeconomic Status	**P = .3556**	yes	**P = .0510**	yes
Group 1 mean	98,430		94,924	
Group 2 mean	101,212		103,765	
School Size	**P = .0294**	yes	**P = .5757**	no
Group 1 mean	-.2402		-.1971	
Group 2 mean	.1662		-.3058	
Student Ethnic Diversity	**P = .0005**	no	**P = .5199**	no
Group 1 mean	.054908		.052804	
Group 2 mean	.076997		.058109	
Student Linguistic Diversity	**P = .0002**	no	**P = .6013**	yes
Group 1 mean	.011412		.011743	
Group 2 mean	.019516		.010909	
Teacher Ethnic Diversity	**P = .0759**	yes	**P = .5227**	yes
Group 1 mean	.085903		.087721	
Group 2 mean	.075670		.083136	
Fiscal Resources	**P = .4319**	no	**P = .2557**	yes
Group 1 mean	74.852		77.267	
Group 2 mean	77.824		71.176	